



Pearl MLX/BLX Pro Series Drumkits

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

The newest line of Pearl drumkits is called the *Pro Series*. Two different shell types are available: maple (*MLX*) and birch (*BLX*). Since my last Pearl kit review (Jan. '85), some features have changed, including the introduction of double-ended high-tension lugs with backing gaskets on all the *Pro Series* drums. Because both the *MLX* and *BLX* kits have practically the same components, this review will focus on the *MLX* drumkit, with details on the *BLX* where needed. Components of the *MLX-22D-5* kit are: 16x22 bass drum, 10x12 and 11x13 tom-toms, 16 x 16 floor tom, and a 6 1/2x14 brass-shell *Free Floating* snare drum.

Bass Drum

The 16x22 bass drum has ten double-ended stretch lugs with T-handle rods, except for the bottom lugs on both sides, where key rods are used instead. Both hoops are maple ply and are lacquer colored to match the drum's finish. The spurs are externally mounted (nothing passes through the drum), and have a telescoping inner leg that has a threaded rubber tip. A spike point can be exposed for maximum "digging-in." The spurs have preset forward setup angles, which helps them hold the drum securely in place, and they fold neatly against the shell when packing up.

Fitted onto the audience side is a *Black Beat* head, with a large white Pearl logo. The batter side has a *Pinstripe*. Both the maple and birch bass drums had a lot of power. The *MLX* was warmer sounding, while the *BLX* had a bit more "edge" to it. Both produce a clear tone with good volume. For today's playing, of course, some dampening is in order.

Mounting System

Pearl has modified its bass drum and tom-tom brackets to now include nylon bushings. The edges of the brackets have been rounded off for a sleeker look, as well. The basics remain the same. The bass drum plate is mounted near the front of the shell and has two holes to accept the separate tom arms. These receptacles are notched to accept a memory lock, and they use an indirect clamping method to close in

on and secure the holder arms. Another change is that the square-headed key screw on one side of the clamp has been replaced by a hinge. The *TH-95* arms pass through the bass drum and mate with another hinged clamp bracket on the tom-tom. Angle adjustment is done via a key screw atop each arm, which frees a concealed ring mechanism, allowing a total angle range of 204 degrees. Memory rings are fitted on both arm ends, and once everything is set, the holder and drums will not move about. It's very easy to set heights, angles, and spreads, and I'm still convinced that the Pearl holder is one of the best on the market.

Tom-Toms

The 10 x 12 and 11 x 13 toms have six double-ended lugs each. The 16 x 16 floor tom has eight lug casings plus three legs. (I'm still petitioning for Pearl to fit spike points on its floor tom legs!) All the drums are fitted with Pearl's 2.3mm *Super Hoops*, which are stronger than regular pressed hoops, and approach the sound of die-casts. They're constructed of rolled steel and definitely seem to give more projection and clarity. There are no internal mufflers (almost everyone has done away with them these days), and nylon rod washers are being used to eliminate the metal-to-metal contact of hoop and rod collar.

Pinstripe batter heads and clear *Ambassador* bottoms are fitted on all the toms. The maple-shelled toms have the expected round, warm sound, while I found that the birch drums were a little sharper and more articulate. Both performed well in the volume department.

Snare Drum

The *MLX* kit comes with a 6 1/2 x 14 brass-shell *Free Floating* snare, while the *BLX* kit has a steel-shelled one. The concept behind the *Free Floating* snare is that the shell itself has no hardware mounted directly, which would constrict its resonance. Also, shells can be interchanged without affecting the tension of the snare wires, or detuning/removing the bottom head. This is accomplished by the use of a

double-rim assembly at the bottom head. The snare side rods feed through the *Super Hoop* (which has a large extended snare gate), and into the second cast steel rim. This rim also holds the ten vertical struts, which accept the batter side rods for tensioning. Rather than being attached to the shell as on normal snare drums, the strainer assembly is also secured to this second rim.

The shell sits between the batter *Super Hoop* and the bottom second rim, devoid of all vibration-restricting attachments. Pearl has brass, copper, maple, and steel shell cylinders for the *Free Floating* snare drums, enabling four different tonal possibilities by merely removing the top head and hoop, lifting out the shell, replacing it with another, and retuning the batter head. This system is quite ingenious, and gives a full natural resonance to the drum.

The strainer uses a center-throw release and has fine-tune knobs at both the throw-off and butt ends. The snare wires extend a bit past the head and are attached via plastic strips, which pass over a secondary bridge before meeting the main body of the strainer. Adjustment is quite simple, and every single snare wire lays completely flat and is evenly tensioned. The strainer has very smooth, efficient action and allows you maximum control over the final sound.

(I am a bit confused as to why Pearl promotes the benefits of the *Free Floating* design for the snare drum, but then proceeds to bolt long, one-piece stretch lugs to the other drums. This must surely have a negative effect on the shells' sound potential. I wonder if Pearl has considered trying the *Free Floating* concept on tom-toms.)

Hardware

The *P-880* bass drum pedal has a split footboard, removable toe stop, and a chain/sprocket drive. A single expansion spring stretches downward along the right side of the frame. Tension is adjusted at the bottom. A slotted piece off the side of the pedal allows positioning of the spring, which also facilitates beater stroke length adjustment. The pedal has sprung spurs at

its base, and clamps to the bass drum hoop using a plate and T-screw. The *P-880* has smooth, effortless action and feels very natural.

The *H-900* hi-hat also has a split foot-board, toe stop, and chain linkage, and stands on a single-braced tripod base. Two externally housed springs serve for tension. Easy adjustment is done at the top of each spring-housing tube. Each leg of the stand has a reversible tip, enabling the use of either rubber feet or spike points to arrest any forward skating. The height tube contains a memory lock and, of course, has the usual tilter adjust screw for the bottom cymbal. The *H-900* is very quiet, never binds, and works easily.

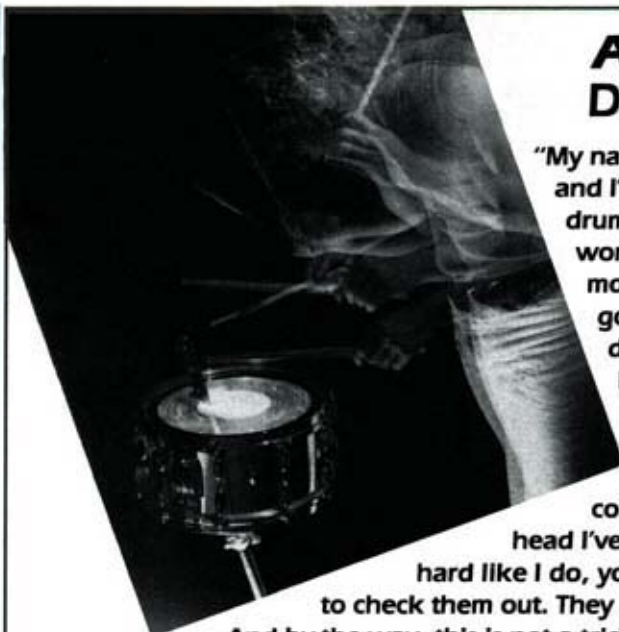
Both the *C-800W* straight cymbal stand and *B-800W* boom stand have double-braced tripod bases and two adjustable height tiers. (Each tier has a black nylon bushing inside.) They both have a concealed-ring tilter mechanism, which makes for smooth setting of any desirable cymbal angle. Both stands are quite sturdy, even when extended to their maximum.

The *S-900W* snare stand also has a double-braced tripod base, and uses the common basket method of holding the drum. The basket is mounted on a swivel, which is offset from the body of the stand. This allows for a wide variety of angles in a full radius, while the base remains in one spot. Like the other hardware pieces, the *S-900W* has good stability.

Cosmetics

The "L" in the *MLX* and *BLX* catalog numbers designates a high-gloss lacquer finish. The *MLX* series has six finishes available—four solid stains (black, red, grey, and white) and two exposed-grain (maple and Sequoia Red). The *BLX* kits come in three solid stains as well as the Sequoia Red grain. All these finishes are on the exterior only, as the insides of the drums are sprayed with a clear lacquer. (Four plastic coverings are available in maple-shelled kits only.) I saw the Artic White solid-stain, and the Sequoia Red exposed grain, and both finishes look marvelous. By the way, the toms all have double logo badges, and every drum has its own individual serial number.

Something to be aware of, merely for the sake of accuracy, is that Pearl has relocated all production to Taiwan. This is no cause for alarm, as the company's standards are equal to (if not greater than) what they were in Japan. In fact, I'm told Pearl is using a 41-stage plating process for the chroming of all hardware. These kits are still the pro quality Pearl has been known for, with no compromises. In fact, if the logo badges didn't state the country of origin, I'd never know it. The *MLX-22D-5* kit retails at \$2,580; the *BLX-22D-5* retails at \$1,980.

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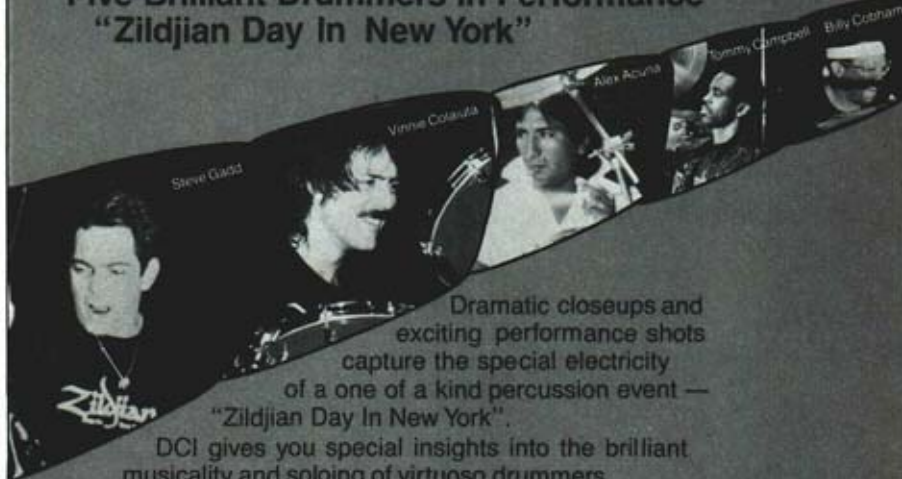
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